Cahiers du MONDE RUSSE

Cahiers du monde russe
Russie - Empire russe - Union soviétique et États indépendants

46/4 | 2005
L'invention d'une politique humanitaire

Valerie A. Kivelson, Robert H. Green, eds., Orthodox Russia

Lilya Berezhnaya

OpenEdition Journals

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/6574
ISSN: 1777-5388

Publisher
Éditions de l'EHESS

Printed version
Date of publication: 1 December 2005
Number of pages: 874-878
ISBN: 2-7132-2057-2
ISSN: 1252-6576

Electronic reference
Lilya Berezhnaya, « Valerie A. Kivelson, Robert H. Green, eds., Orthodox Russia », *Cahiers du monde russe* [Online], 46/4 | 2005, Online since 29 June 2009, Connection on 19 April 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/6574

2011

Valerie A. Kivelson, Robert H. Green, eds., Orthodox Russia

Lilya Berezhnaya

REFERENCES

Valerie A. KIVELSON, Robert H. GREEN, eds., **Orthodox Russia. Belief and Practice under the Tsars** University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003, 292 p.

1 This book is a must reading for those interested in the history of religion and culture in Russia. It comes in a series of publications following the opening of the Soviet archives in 1991. *Orthodox Russia* is the fruit of the workshops at the University of Michigan representing the new trends in the field which challenge the established historical paradigms. The leading American experts in Russian history, literary, and cultural studies have launched an interdisciplinary and thought-provoking dialogue. Discussions were focused on the problems of sainthood, visual theories, and comparative approaches. For the idea that such a dialogue really took place testify multiple cross-references in the texts of the articles. I shall further comment upon these fragments which constitute a clear advantage of the book.

2 *Orthodox Russia* follows the path of such innovative and critical publications as Stephen K. Batalden, ed., *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine and Georgia* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1993); Samuel H. Baron and Nancy Sh. Kollmann, eds., *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Russia and Ukraine* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1997) and two volumes of the *Medieval Russian Culture*, edited by Michael S. Flier, Daniel Rowland and Henrik Birnbaum (University of California Press, 1984, 1994). Many authors who have participated in these editions contributed also to the *Orthodox Russia*. Still, the latter volume reconsiders the previous experience concentrating mainly upon the problems of the "lived religiosity." Valerie Kivelson, who is known for her studies of the early modern Russian nobility popular beliefs and imaginary, is particularly interested in the methods and approaches of historical anthropology. As

stated in the editors' introduction, the book is aimed at studying how "the religion was taught, internalized, or practiced at a local level" (p. 9). It goes where political accounts of Russia's past have not, into the thoughts, habits, and rituals of the Orthodox people during the long time span. The book covers the period from the early seventeenth century until the beginning of the Soviet times. Nevertheless, the editors have consciously avoided organizing the material according to the chronological principle. Instead, they arranged the articles thematically into four parts ("Destabilizing Dichotomies," "Imagining the Sacred," "Encountering the Sacred," and "Living Orthodoxy"), allowing the readers to make historical comparisons themselves.

3 It seems that in their selection Valerie Kivelson and Robert Green were guided by two purposes. One was to provide enough materials and the latest insights into the history of Russian Orthodoxy for the students. Another aim was to overthrow the established stereotypes dominating in historical narratives on which the courses' syllabi are based. Therefore the book is supplied by maps, chronological tables, annotated bibliography, and a brief outline of the history of Russian Orthodoxy. Besides, in the introduction the editors map the major research zones on which they aim to shed a new light. They mention the so-called "*dvoeverie*"; the ideas of the amorphous, adaptable, ritual, and superficial Orthodoxy; the notions of the "timeless" Russian Apocalyptism. The book reconsiders the views on the Russian heterodoxies and challenges the established dualistic models. *Orthodox Russia* provides also adequate comparisons with the Western European history.

4 Another focal point is gender studies. From twelve essays at least five treat the issues of women religiosity, which still remains *terra incognita* for many Slavists. This research gap is well known and widely discussed in modern scholarship. The editors of the *Orthodox Russia* also notice the "astonishingly little work" done in the gender studies of Russian religiosity (p. 12).

5 Still, the main emphasis in all the articles is put upon the interplay between theology and religious practice. This research task is enlarged and theoretically grounded in the article of Yale professor Laura Engelstein. She provides methodological basis for studying the degree "to which formal standards of belief affected ordinary parishioners" (p. 24). The author paves the ways for new investigations which should challenge the traditional binaries of the doctrinal versus enacted, high versus low, and old versus new. L. Engelstein tackles this problem while giving a brief historiographical overview of the studies dealing with the popular and elite religiosity in the eighteenth-twentieth-century Russian Empire. It constitutes a ground for two other studies found in the first chapter, the article of Daniel Rowland on the Golden Hall of the Moscow Kremlin and Vera Shevzov's reflections on Orthodoxy and community in late imperial Russia. Both texts are remarkable for treating the problem of audience, i.e., of those Muscovite laymen and laywomen who either heard or viewed what was proclaimed from the pulpit or painted on the murals. For Shevzov these very people constituted the main body of the church. They expressed their religious feelings through experience, not through intellectual mastery (p. 68). Shevzov pays special attention to the "churchness" (*tserkovnost'*) notion as a widely spread phenomenon of the late nineteenth-century popular religiosity. The author comes to a conclusion that the boundary between the "elite" and "popular" religious traditions in fact merged hence the notion of the "official" Orthodoxy should be seriously reconsidered (p. 76).

6 Rowland is more concerned with the reception theory and the political imaginary of the viewing public. He discovers how the servitor class of the early modern Muscovy learned the basic vocabulary of political ideas. For him it came mostly through the viewing experience which provided a language for understanding political relations (p. 57). Thus Rowland opposes the concept put forth by Edward L. Keenan on the duality of the early modern Russian culture. Rowland argues that the split between the secular and religious traditions in fact did not exist (p. 35).

7 Noteworthy, Keenan's ideas fall into a multiple critique in the course of the studies presented in this book. Besides Shevzov and Rowland, Daniel Kaiser keeps reservations about the conclusions drown by the Harvard professor of Russian history. Kaiser, who dealt with a great number of act materials, objects the doubts in the authentic religious experience among the ordinary believers. For him it is clear that Orthodox Christianity exerted a powerful influence on quotidian life (p. 192).

8 This view is fully shared by the authors of the second chapter. In their articles Eve Levin and Nadezhda Kizenko are dealing with the construction of the saint-hood in early modern and modern Russia. For both historians crucial are the popular cults and relations between the laity's and the Church hierarchy's devotions. However, Kizenko is more inclined to emphasize the gender aspect of the veneration, while Levin pays more attention to the concepts of human body. Yet the difference in approaches is also traceable on the typology of saints. Kizenko affirms that a "fool for Christ" (*blazhennyi*) was adherent to the medieval and early modern type of a saint. Whereas modern saint was characterized by his/her support of the autocracy (St. Ioann of Kronstadt as an example) (p. 107, footnote 4). Levin's insightful accounts into the history of the early modern canonization processes prove the crucial role of the tragic death in the posthumous veneration. American historian argues that this feature is characteristic to the Muscovite times realities while "the Russians seems to have been largely unconcerned with the prior earthly lives of their newfound miracle workers" (p. 93).

9 Kizenko's views on the typology of saints are also challenged by Isolde Thyrêt, an author of a book on the royal women in Muscovite Russia.[1] In the *Orthodox Russia* she looks at the topic of sainthood through the lens of gender. Thyrêt pays special attention to the spiritual practice in Muscovite Russia posing the question how women related to the holy and experienced it in a "feminine way" (p. 159). For Thyrêt the figure of St. Kseniia of Petersburg, whom Kizenko attributes the features of the early modern saint, was not perceived as a subversive, as in the case of the holy fools, but testifies to medieval Russia's ability to embrace role reversal for women saints as an option (p. 166).

10 More on women spirituality can be found in the articles of Gary Marker and William G. Wagner, placed in the forth chapter. The former deals with the place of Orthodoxy in the lives of lay people in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries Russian Empire. It is based on the diary of a provincial noblewoman Anna Labzina (1758-1828)[2] and is aimed at proving that spiritual action could be gender-specific (p. 203). Marker's study is also valuable for the historiographical overview of the studies dealing with the popular religiosity in Russia (p. 196-197).

11 Wagner's article deals with the functioning of the Convent of the Exaltation of the Cross in Nizhnii Novgorod from the beginning of the nineteenth century through the early Soviet period. This study is based on the statistical materials from the local archive. It provides a fascinating account of the growth and reorientation of female monasticism in

pre-revolutionary Russia (p. 212) combining the micro-history and gender studies' approaches. Wagner also offers a fresh view on the village life in Russia at the turn of the century. He argues that these lands were "not devoid of deeply pious Orthodox women willing to commit themselves to some forms of religious life" (p. 223).

12 Another insightful and detailed analysis of the popular mentality is presented in the article of the director of the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute Michael Flier. The study devoted to the apocalyptical expectations in Russian historical experience before 1500 summarizes the author's recent research on eschatological tradition in early modern Russia.[3] On the basis of the written and iconographic sources, Flier draws a conclusion that there is no evidence documenting popular millenarian agitation, uprising or the appearance of messiah figures akin to those experienced in the West for five centuries after the year 1000, and in seventeenth-century Muscovy (p. 128). This opinion conflicts with the popular views on Russian Orthodoxy (Flier quotes in this context the works of N. Berdiaev) and fits into the latest discussions on the role of eschatological expectations in the formation of the state ideology in the sixteenth-seventeenth-century Muscovy.[4] In this respect Flier's contribution is a much-needed, up-to-date survey of the subject with the references to the Byzantine tradition and the post-Time of Troubles' views on Muscovy as a "Chosen Land" of New Jerusalem.

13 *Orthodox Russia* impresses a reader by a variety of interdisciplinary approaches and new materials. There is, however, a gap which could be regarded as an agenda for further research. Most of the period covered by this book belongs to the imperial times in the history of Russia. *Orthodox Russia* pays little attention to the problems of religious coexistence and transformations within the Orthodox tradition in the multi-confessional Russian Empire. Partly this gap is filled by the article of Paul Werth devoted to the religious identities of the converted communities, the baptized Finnic and Turkic people of the region around the confluence of the Volga and Kama rivers. While studying the forms of religious devotion at the margins of the Empire, Werth operates with the terminology of conversion and religious discipline. He draws a boundary between Orthodoxy and Russianness (p. 248) and demonstrates that Orthodoxy was sometimes used as a tool in maintaining ethnic and cultural particularities (p. 240).

14 The book finishes with an epilogue belonging to a specialist in the field of the early modern religious studies in Western Europe. Emeritus professor at the University of Michigan Thomas N. Tentler lays a foundation for comparative religious studies. His article, entitled "A View from the West," is not merely an agenda for the further research, but also a warning against ethnocentrism. Thus it is addressed to the Slavists as well as to the historians of the West, crashing the established stereotypes of alien cultures (p. 256). Tentler maps the major lines along which the comparisons could be made. For him these are the studies of ecclesiology and the history of Universities, saints and sainthood, sin, repentance, and discipline. For the sake of truth, it should be mentioned that some of these appeals have already found response among the authors of the *Orthodox Russia*. Engelstein, Thyrêt, and Flier have based their research upon comparisons with the Western tradition after the Reformation. This should be a good sign of the integration of Russian studies into a wider context of cultural scholarship. Including, of course, the Russian-speaking audience.

15 A book addressed to the Western researchers can be of much use for the specialists in religious studies from the post-Soviet countries. They can gain a valuable experience from interdisciplinary approaches and the methods of dealing with the sources. For

instance, Kaiser lists materials which can be used for the study of popular religiosity in early modern Muscovy. These are parish records and population inventories, testaments and wedding contracts, reports of foreign visitors and the lists of Christian names.[5] All these sources can be of enormous importance for the study of the transmission of the Christian ideas into a popular milieu.

16 There is, however, another side of a coin. There are only few mentioning of the recent Russian and other post-Soviet countries' scholarship in the *Orthodox Russia*. Meanwhile, for the Western specialists bridging the gap between two research traditions can also be useful. The articles dealing with the gender aspect of Russian spirituality could be enriched by the works of Natalia L. Pushkareva.[6] Flier does not mention a recent book of Aleksei I. Alekseev, a valuable contribution into the history of eschatological notions in early modern Russia.[7] These and other perspectives will further allow challenging the binary categorizations which tend to oversimplify the religious experience of the past.

NOTES

1. I. Thyrêt,*Between God and Tsar: Religious Symbolism and the Royal Women of Muscovite Russia* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001).

2. G. Marker has recently published this diary supplying it with introduction. See, G. Marker, R. May, eds. and trans., *Days of a Russian Noblewoman: The Memories of Anna Labzina* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001).

3. See also his "The Iconography of Royal Ritual in Sixteenth-Century Muscovy," in S. Vryonis, Jr., ed., *Byzantine Studies: Essays on the Slavic World and the Eleventh Century* (New Rochelle, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1992): 53-76; idem, "Court Ceremony in an Age of Reform: Patriarch Nikon and the Palm Sunday Ritual," in S. H. Baron and N. Sh. Kollmann, eds., *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Russia and Ukraine* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997): 73-95.

4. T. Oparina, *Ivan Nasedka i polemicheskoe bogoslovie kievskoi metropolii* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1998); N. Synitsyna, *Tretii Rim. Istoki i evoliutsiia russkoi srednevekovoi kontseptsii (XV-XVI vv.)* (Moscow: Indrik, 1998): 307-346.

5. Some of the D. Kaiser's highly useful inventories of Muscovite wills and dowries are available at:
http://web.grinnell.edu/individuals/kaiser/wills.html.

6. See N. L. Pushkareva, *Women in Russian History: From the Tenth to the Twentieth Century,* translated and edited by E. Levin(Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997).

7. A. Alekseev points out also to another valuable source in the study of popular eschatological views, namely the sinodiks. A. I. Alekseev, *Pod znakom kontsa vremen. Ocherki russkoi religioznosti kontsa XIV - nachala XVI vv.* (SPb.: Aleteiia, 2002).